

TOPAZ

Continued from B1

future was."

8-11-02

Iiyama was among several hundred former internees and their descendents who traveled Saturday from as far away as Hawaii for the 60th anniversary of the camp, reminding themselves, and the world, of the grave injustices they suffered and the rampant discrimination they faced.

They also renewed old friendships, not only with fellow internees but with the folks from Delta who worked at the camp and became their friends. And under the shade in Delta's downtown Main Street park, they recalled what it was like to be held against their will for up to three years following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

In addition to losing their freedom, the internees lost their personal possessions, their homes, their jobs, their cars.

And when it became apparent the United States was winning the war, they were told it was all a big mistake, that they could leave.

In batches they slowly began evacuating the camp. The government gave each of them \$25 and a bus ride to the railroad

station, where they started on yet another journey to rebuild their lives.

"When it came time to leave, the government told us to leave, to all be out by Oct. 31, 1945. But we had no possessions, no homes, no place to go," recalled Toru Saito, a retired mental health worker who lived in Topaz from age 5 through 8 and now lives in Berkeley, Calif.

Said Ted Nagata, who lived in the camp from age 6 to 9, "America put its own people into prison and then just said they were sorry. That should not be forgotten, and it should never happen again."

Nagata, now a graphic artist, designed a new monument dedicated Saturday afternoon during "The Ties That Bind" pilgrimage. The previous monument was destroyed by vandals who used it for target practice. The new one is smaller and is a less obvious target.

The former internees Saturday afternoon once again boarded buses and traveled to the desert camp 16 miles west of Delta. Of the 19,000 acres that six decades ago were covered with barracks, enclosed by barb wire fences and guarded by soldiers armed with machine guns, a little over 500 acres is preserved in memory of the internment camp. The rest of the land

after World War II was deeded to returning soldiers and is now covered with private homes and subdivisions.

Many in the United States at the time of the war were not even aware of their country's 10 internment camps holding a total of 120,000 Japanese-Americans. That's why as each person spoke during the day, whether publicly or privately, another resounding theme consistently came across. Let's never forget.

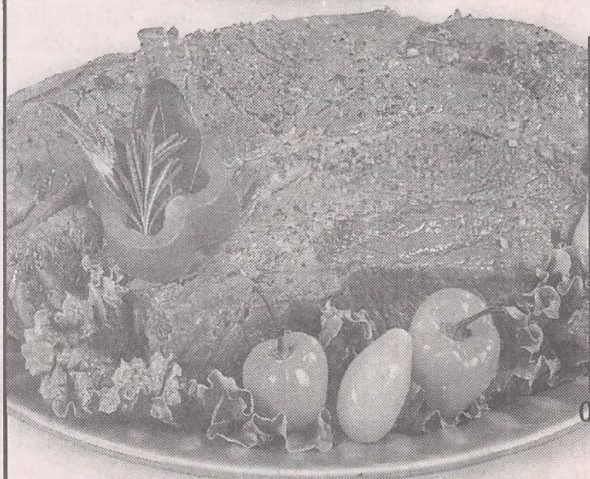
Soon, there won't be many left who experienced life in the camp to tell what happened there. Many of those who spent their younger years there are now in their 80s, some older. It is still a hard story to tell, and they often let their children and grandchildren tell it, as was the case during the speakers forum at midday in the park.

"There's an anger and a fear and a sorrow from Topaz, but there's also a beauty — the friendships, the love and the kindness all rolled into one," said Jane Beckwith, an English teacher at Delta High School and curator of the Topaz museum, who directed the day's events.

"And what you will hear today are . . . stories ripe with the sweet truth of humanity."

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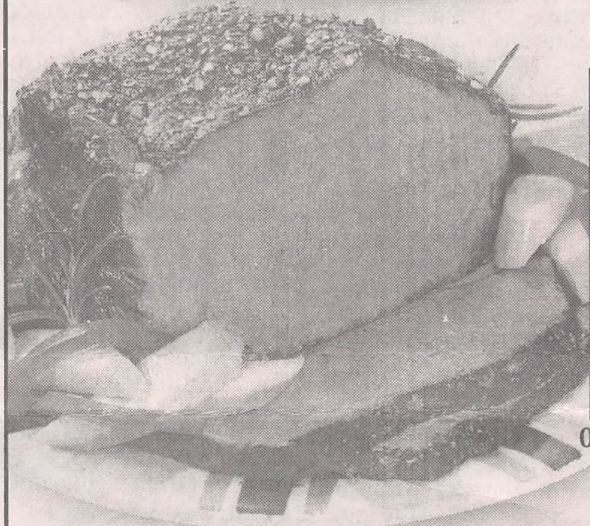
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